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# NEGRO WOMEN WAR WORKERS

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WOMEN'S BUREAU  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

# LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,  
WOMEN'S BUREAU,  
*Washington, April 6, 1945.*

MADAM: I have the honor to transmit to you a report that brings together what seem to be the most significant of the very limited data on Negro women workers in the war period. There is a constant demand for material on this important subject.

The study is the work of Kathryn Blood, of the division of public information.

Respectfully submitted.

FRIEDA S. MILLER, *Director.*

HON. FRANCES PERKINS.

*Secretary of Labor.*

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## FOREWORD

"Negro Women War Workers" attempts to assemble material currently available to show what contributions Negro women are bringing to the war work of the United States.

While no recent Women's Bureau survey has been made specifically to study Negro women's employment, general occupational surveys made by the Bureau in the last two and a half years show some of the new jobs that have opened for the Negro woman worker which may be considered typical. Such examples, together with a number from other sources, are presented in this bulletin as a series of vignettes of Negro women's work in munitions plants; in steel mills, foundries, shipyards, aircraft plants; on the railroads and in the canneries, in laundries and restaurants, as well as in many other jobs.

What this report tells is a story of ways in which Negro women have helped to bridge the manpower gap. Working together with men and women of every other national origin, their contribution is one which this Nation would be unwise to forget or to evaluate falsely. They are an integral part of America's prospect. Not only have they helped to produce the weapons of war, but their labor has been a large factor in preventing a major break-down of essential consumer services.

No Nation-wide statistics later than those of the 1940 decennial census are available for either the number or the occupations of Negro women workers. However, valuable data on Negro (nonwhite) employment were secured by the Census Bureau's Monthly Report on the Labor Force for April 1944, and these statistics are analyzed and compared with 1940 census data in the following pages.

Census statistics for 1940 give the basic picture of Negro women's occupational pattern before the war. This information, with the census data from earlier decades, shows clearly that even before the war the Negro woman worker had an important place in the American economy, and in some occupations formed a very large part of all workers. The figures will be of value to persons who must deal with postwar employment policies.

Larger proportions of Negro than of white women, both in 1940 and in 1944, were in paid employment. Nearly 1 in 3 Negro women were employed in 1940, in contrast to 1 in 5 white women. By 1944 the proportion of employed Negro women increased to 2 in 5, while the employed white women increased to almost 1 in 3.

*"I have a job to do in this great scheme of production."*

These are the proud words of a Negro woman—a welder in a shipyard.

A *job*? What does a *job* mean?

It means *security*—individual—national—world. *Security*—the best weapon against poverty and disease—against defeat at home and on the battlefield.

Negro women need—

*Jobs*—with no bars erected because of color, creed, or sex—jobs not only today but in the postwar world.



*Courtesy U. S. Navy*

Welder in a shipyard.

## NEGRO WOMEN WAR WORKERS

### FOR AMERICA AT WAR<sup>1</sup>

BEHIND THE NOISE—the hammer, the thunder, the drive—that typifies America at war is a group of women, Negro women, who have pooled their strength with that of all other Americans in an effort to achieve a common goal—Victory. Carrying their full share of the Nation's wartime load, they are at work in every section of the country. In the steel mills and the foundries, in the aircraft plants and the shipyards, Negro women are helping to make the weapons of war. Not only are they working in war plants but their services in laundries and restaurants, on railroads and farms, and in countless other essential civilian industries have helped to make it possible for America to become the arsenal of the United Nations. Negro women's wartime performance has proved that, given the training, they can succeed in any type of work that women can do.

#### **Trail Blazers for Uncle Sam on the Production Front.**

##### **Shipyards.**

More than one precedent was broken when in 1942 women mechanics were hired at the Brooklyn Navy Yard for the first time in 141 years. It was a red-letter day for women when the doors of the navy yard swung open. For Negro women especially it was a triumphant day, for a Negro girl received a grade of 99, the highest rating of any of the 6,000 women who took the civil-service examination for navy-yard jobs. She and another Negro girl who also showed special aptitude for work with precision instruments were assigned to the instrument division, where binoculars, telescopes, and range finders are reconditioned. Of the first 125 women hired at the Brooklyn Navy Yard about 12 were Negro. At a second eastern navy yard, highly qualified Negro girls were among the first women hired in 1942. Since the work is skilled and strenuous, every new employee is required to pass rigid aptitude and physical tests.

In the Washington (D. C.) Navy Yard, Negro women are employed in the cartridge-case shop as well as in other shops. Some several hundred Negro women—most of whom are married and are mothers—are working there. They are operating punch and blanking presses as well as lathes and tapping machines in the manufacture of cartridge cases.

<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Woman's Bureau research and general surveys.

In the summer of 1943 about 2,000 women were employed in the Washington Navy Yard. Women were hired for naval ordnance jobs only if they had had 100 hours of training in machine-shop practice. In paying tribute to the splendid contribution of Negro women, an official of the navy yard said: "Negro women have played an important role in the production of ordnance materials during the present war. In the production of cartridge cases they are responsible for keeping production at a high peak. Both the output and morale in the shop reflect the cooperative spirit in which women have been accepted. Negro women have demonstrated their ability to adapt themselves to a field of endeavor that was foreign to them as well as to other women in the yard."

Negro women also were working on fuze-loading at the Bellevue (Md.) Naval Magazine. Behind steel barricades they measured and loaded pom-pom mix, lead azide, TNT, tetryl, and fulminate of mercury. The various loading operations are strung along differently grouped assembly lines. On one line, for example, women loaded tetryl lead-ins for bomb fuzes, or delay elements containing small cells of black powder, or mercury fulminate and lead azide for detonators. In small steel booths others received an element through a hole in the wall, put in the measured milligrams of powder, and passed it cautiously through an opposite hole to the next booth for another twist, tap, or turn.

#### **Aircraft.**

In aircraft plants also there are many Negro women pioneers. More than 2 years ago Negro women were working on production, including machine operation, assembly, and inspection, in at least 15 major aircraft plants on the west coast, the east coast, and in the Middle West. Many of them had received their job training from NYA or other free Government training classes. One of the first aircraft plants to hire Negro girls in mechanical jobs was the airplane-engine division of the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

#### **Electrical equipment and machinery.**

Another of the large woman-employing industries in which Negro women have been at work for several years is the manufacture of electrical machinery and equipment. From the personnel director of one of the leading electrical manufacturing companies this report came to the Women's Bureau early in the war: "We have on our rolls at the present time approximately 2,000 Negro women, the majority of whom have been added in the last 6 to 9 months. They are engaged in 45 separate and distinct occupational classifications covering a rather wide range of skills. Included among their assignments are bench hands on various kinds of partial and final assemblies, cable formers, clerks, inspectors, many kinds of machine operators, solderers, stock selectors, electrical testers, and wiremen."



Assembling a  
bomber motor  
mount.

Photo unit  
worker in a  
bomber plant.



*Courtesy Boeing Aircraft Co.*

"One of the best men in the shop," according to the foreman, was a Negro girl in the electrical-repair department of the overhaul and repair shops of a large eastern airline field.

#### **Ordnance.**

In little more than a year after Pearl Harbor, Negro women were assigned to many of the more difficult technical laboratory jobs at the Army Proving Ground at Aberdeen, Md., where all types of guns, tanks, and other fighting equipment are tested. The girls employed in the ballistics laboratory were college graduates, and all had a thorough background of higher mathematics. Only two years of college were required, however, in the star gaging section, where they tested bores and curvatures of guns. According to a War Department personnel specialist, the Negro girls in the Aberdeen laboratories "proved very satisfactory."

Early in the present armament program, Negroes comprised at least 350 of the women employed at an Ohio ordnance plant. One of the Negro women who came in as a warehouse worker was put in charge of a crew of women packers, both white and Negro, and later was made a counselor.

Another midwestern ordnance plant employed 700 Negro women soon after the war began. They worked in a variety of jobs, and included supervisors, stenographers, machine operators, nurses, photograph technicians, draftsmen, machine adjusters, movemen, jantors, and matrons.

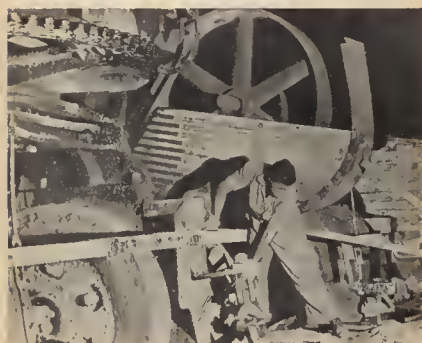
In a survey made by the National Metal Trades Association in 1943, 62 plants were found that employed women. Of these plants 19 employed Negro women, most of whom were in janitor service. However, one plant reported a total of 1,200 Negro women distributed among all the departments where women were at work. Other plants reported successful employment of Negro women in such occupations as work in a foundry, operation of machine tools including turret lathes, all types of winding operations, inspection, a variety of bench work, assembly, painting, electrical work, riveting, flame cutting, and welding.

#### **Steel mills—Foundries.**

Negro women were employed in most of the 41 steel mills surveyed by the Women's Bureau in 1943. Areas visited by Women's Bureau agents included Pittsburgh-Youngstown, Buffalo, Chicago-Gary, and West Virginia, and one mill each in Colorado, Sparrows Point (Md.), and Bethlehem (Pa.). While women were working in most divisions of the steel industry, their proportion was small, about 8 percent covering all races. In some of the mills, however, women were found in almost every department. There were women working at the ore docks, in the storage yards for raw materials, on the coal and ore trestles, in the coke plants, the blast furnaces, the steel furnaces, the rolling mills, and the finishing mills that were doing fabricating on shells, guns, and regular products such as nails, spikes, and bolts.



The majority of the Negro women, like the white women, worked at labor jobs. The proportion of Negro women in the masonry and outside-labor gangs was large. Where women were employed in the sintering plants they were chiefly Negroes, and were reported as moving as much dirt and material as men. Jobs around a sintering plant are all dirty and chiefly of a labor grade; everything around such a plant is covered with iron dust. The sintering plant salvages ore dust and blast-furnace flue dust by mixing it with water and spreading it on moving conveyors that carry it under gas flames for baking into clukery masses known as sinters, which are charged back to the furnace. Considerable numbers of women in these plants worked on dumping the cars of ore and dust, inspecting along the sides of the conveyor to remove lumps of slag and foreign matter, shoveling up spills along the conveyor lines, screening coal and dust, carrying tests to the laboratory, etc.



"Panman" in a steel mill.

*Courtesy Life Magazine*

Plants on the Great Lakes receive most of their ore supply by boat. At one of these plants women were working at the ore docks. Though the boats are unloaded by electric ore bridge cranes that scoop up 15 to 20 tons in each bucket load and empty a boat in a few hours, it is necessary for labor gangs to go down into the bottoms of the boats and sweep and shovel up the leavings of ore into piles for removal by special hoists, as

the grab-buckets cannot clean up around the sides and edges. To do this work a crew of women, chiefly Negro, and with a woman gang leader, went from boat to boat as needed. When there were no boats ready for cleaning, they worked around the docks and stock yards as a part of the general clean-up labor gang. The ore, coal, and limestone are heavy to handle, even when a small shovel is used.

In two of the steel mills visited by the Bureau, a Negro woman was employed as panman. The job of the panman is to mix the fire clay, shoveling the materials into a mixing mill, for sealing the casting hole of the blast furnace. The work is carried on in a blast-furnace shed. Mud mixing is not a full-time job and is incidental to other labor.

Another unusual job held by a Negro woman was that of operating a steel-burning machine. This intricate machine, 25 feet long and 6 feet high, cuts parts for 6 different kinds of antiaircraft guns from huge plates of steel. The acetylene torches cut two parts at a time and must be set and guided with precision. The operator must have a dozen or more controls set exactly right.

In the Buffalo area Negro women were breaking into many jobs traditionally closed to women in the steel industry. In one large plant in this area Negro women made up about one-third of the total number of women employed.

Review of the situation in the steel mills, however, indicates quite general acceptance of the position that women's employment in steel is only for the duration of the war, and that men returning from the armed services will take over the jobs on the basis of seniority and priority rights in the industry.

Negro women were employed in 8 of the 13 foundries visited by Women's Bureau representatives in the latter half of 1913. A few of the foundries produced small as well as large castings. In the foundry itself, excluding other departments, the 13 establishments surveyed reported the proportion of women (race not stated) as 16 percent (3,631) of the workers. In one midwestern foundry 50 percent of the women were Negro, and in one steel-castings corporation such percent was 67.

Women were found in occupations ranging from the shoveling and mixing of sand and other unskilled types of labor to fairly skilled work in the fine finishing of molds. A few foundries indicated that they might keep women after the war in some of these jobs, individual foundries stating that women may be retained in jobs at which they excelled. Included in the list of jobs mentioned were clerical work, drafting, laboratory work, sand testing, operation of the heat-treat furnaces, and the making of small cores. Many foundries were convinced that women were better than men at the making of small cores. No large numbers of women, however, seemed likely to remain in foundry work after the war, even if they wished to do so. In a predominantly male industry they would have little opportunity to acquire the higher skills or advance

up the job-progression ladder. The heavy nature of much of the work in itself would prevent that.

#### **Arsenal of the United Nations—Detroit.**

The Bureau of the Census reports that the number of nonwhite women employed in the Detroit-Willow Run Area rose from 14,451 in March 1940 to 46,750 in June 1944. Fewer than 30 Negro women were employed in war plants in this area in July 1942, but by November 1943 about 14,000 were so employed. Early in 1944, 7 to 8 percent of the workers in the entire State of Michigan were Negroes, and it was estimated that almost 6 percent of them were women.

Negro women in the Detroit area early in 1944 were working as machine operators, assemblers, inspectors, stenographers, interviewers, sweepers, material handlers, and at various other jobs in all types of work where women can be used. The first woman hired as a detailer by a small engineering company was a Negro woman trained in engineering. A company that for some time resisted taking Negro women employed two as inspectors in the middle of December 1943; a few months later it had 47 Negro women inspectors and machine operators.

In one Detroit company Negro women made up 10 to 12 percent of the 1,000 women employed. Another that used a large number of women had about 25 to 30 percent Negro women; they were in every department and worked at almost every skill. In this company, management and the union backed the rights of its Negro workers—men and women—for advancement on a basis of seniority and skill.

A foundry that employed some 250 women had about 12 percent Negro women. Women applicants were interviewed and hired on a basis of qualifications and ability to adjust to other workers without regard to creed or color.

Though a company had been violating War Manpower Commission regulations on discriminatory newspaper advertising, it was persuaded to withdraw the advertisement and cooperate with the WMC and the union in introducing Negro women workers. As a result, in 1944 the proportions of Negro women in this company's two plants were 29 percent and 35 percent.

A company that had hired about 1,500 Negro women reported that they made up from 8 to approximately 25 percent of the women in its various plants. Another company opened certain departments to women in one of its plants. At the beginning it hired one Negro in every two women employed. In 1944, of approximately 8,000 women in this plant, around 75 percent were Negro, and the company was pleased with their production performance.

**Essential Civilian Industries.  
Service jobs.**

The foregoing pages report a few of the recorded instances typical of great numbers of Negro women who with loyalty and skill have forwarded the massive war production program of their country. Even at its maximum, however, that record would register but a small share of the support coming to the war economy through the labor of Negro women workers. Customary work positions and previous experience easily account for their presence in great numbers in essential civilian jobs in laundry, food, and restaurant establishments, in hotels and lodging houses, and in other service industries. Doubtless many of the women so employed do not even realize that they are doing war work, work which affects directly the country's war production.

Said the president of a large west coast aircraft corporation late in 1943: *We think every worker we can place in a laundry is worth three new workers in our own plants.* A company survey had revealed that in these plants most absenteeism was caused not by hangovers but by a lack of such community services as laundries and restaurants. Bomber production was being affected because workers in these plants could not get their washing done, nor buy their meals in restaurants. "The result was," said the president, "that we had to start an advertising campaign to urge unemployed people to take jobs in laundries and restaurants so our own people could stay on their jobs."

**Canneries.**

Large numbers of Negro women were working in New Jersey and New York canneries visited by Women's Bureau representatives in the summer and fall of 1943. Much work in the fields also was being done by them. Products handled by the canneries ranged from soup to coffee and from baby food to army rations.

Cannery labor was secured from many sources—housewives, students, soldiers, sailors, migratory workers taken north in trucks from Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, and other Southern States in numbers far exceeding those of previous years, Jamaicans and Bahamians. Women were used in a wide range of jobs in the preparation of fruits and vegetables. Their jobs included the more usual ones of sorting, peeling, trimming, feeding machines, on the can line as well as jobs new to women in those particular plants; jobs involving the control of retorts and of pulping, extracting, evaporating, and scalding equipment. Some women were doing heavy labor such as unloading cars, handling cases weighing from 15 to 42 pounds, handling bushel baskets filled with produce. Others were employed as general laborers feeding cans, salvaging cans, shaking sacks, and as conveyor and belt attendants. As maintenance and miscellaneous workers women were employed as janitors, elevator operators, truckers, directors of shed and yard traffic, and to clean and grease machines.

Housing provided for migratory workers ranged from tent colonies to a trailer camp and a converted summer hotel. In three of the camps in which Negro families were living in tents it was stated that new housing had been planned for them and was to be built by the Federal Public Housing Authority. Nearly 150 Negro women were living in the barracks built originally for a CCC camp. At a Farm Security Administration camp, 100 Negro families were living in tents but gradually were being provided with other accommodations. At another camp occupied by Negro families, the housing consisted of a combination of frame houses built during World War I, of new prefabricated houses, and of tents. One company built a one-story dormitory on cannery property for 250 women, both white and Negro.

#### **Transportation.**

Filling jobs from "baggage smasher" to trackworker, Negro women railroad employees have done their share to keep the Nation's war wheels turning. The work of these women is invaluable, since the railroads are one of the country's major war arteries, transporting the armed forces and carrying to them food, clothing, and weapons, and at the same time supplying civilians with the essentials of every day living. Negro women have filled a variety of jobs, ranging from the unskilled, such as cleaning and janitor work, to the semiskilled. A few have held highly skilled jobs. Neither Negro nor white women, however, have found their way as yet into many skilled jobs in transportation, which long has been considered a man's industry.

A railroad survey made by Women's Bureau representatives revealed that one large railroad system employed over 4,500 Negro women in 1943; in fact, Negroes made up 21 percent of all women employed by this road. The largest groups worked as section and extra gang men (1,138); laborers (1,019); coach cleaners (967); and cullers, loaders, and truckers (546). This railroad was also employing Negro women as dining-car waitresses and as coach-lunch waitresses. A Negro woman was head waitress on one of the diners. Other Negro women worked in the railroad's commissary kitchen and as station elevator operators. A Negro woman was forewoman of a gang of 38 coach cleaners at one of the yards.

The Bureau found 400 Negro women working for one western railroad system, making up over 13 percent of the total of their sex employed. The largest groups of these women were general laborers (148), section and extra gang men (114), and coach cleaners (83). Another western railroad had 48 Negro women as coach cleaners in one of its yards.

One of the most unusual railroad jobs for a woman was held by a Negro woman in Georgia. Probably the first woman train announcer in the United States, she started her railroad career 25 years ago by doing odd jobs, icing and watering the trains, cleaning up the station's carpenter shop. Her job as caller started accidentally when the stationmaster



Railroad  
terminal  
worker.

*Courtesy New York  
Central Railroad System*

Bacteriologist  
in a Government  
bureau.



*Courtesy U. S. Department of Agriculture*

asked her not to let anyone miss a train. She got copies of all schedules and began to memorize them. Today her voice is a station essential.

Various street-transportation companies have hired Negro women as car and bus cleaners and as helpers in shops. In several large municipalities they have acted as car or bus operators and conductors. For example, New York City's first woman streetcar operator was a Negro woman.

The intercity bus industry has employed Negro women in various sections of the country, chiefly as cleaners and maids. One company employed Negro women at filling stations, servicing trucks. This company not only states that their work has been satisfactory, but stresses their stability and says they have presented no special problem in absenteeism or labor turn-over.

The inland waterways, including the Great Lakes, have employed Negro women as cooks, waitresses, maids, and stewardesses. A few women have done overhaul and repair work for the air lines.

#### **In the Line of Duty.**

In the performance of their work many Negro women achieve unusual individual distinction. An outstanding example of such a woman is an Arkansas arsenal worker. A munitions laborer in the production division, she twice rescued fellow workers from burning to death when fire broke out in the plant's incendiary section. For this heroism she became the first woman to receive the War Department's highest civilian award for exceptional service. The Award of Emblem for Exceptional Civilian Service, the civilian equivalent of the Distinguished Service Medal, was presented to her. The citation accompanying the award praised her for "exceptional conduct in performance of outstanding service beyond the call of duty."

Among the Negro women who have shown exceptional skill in their war-plant jobs is a worker who became champion arc welder and one of two winners in the Negro Freedom Rally's competition for "Miss Negro Victory Worker of 1941." One of seven Negro girls in a New York war plant, she admits it was no easy task to surpass her fellow workers and thereby win the national merit award that was given her and the co-winner, a Negro girl from Detroit. After the presentation of the award in Madison Square Garden, both girls were taken to New York City Hall to receive Mayor LaGuardia's congratulations.

In speaking of her award, the champion arc welder said: "When you work in a war plant—and maybe this is my own personal feeling—you talk very little while you work but you do a lot of thinking. And with the roar of machinery you sort of get a message which seems to say to you that this job must be well done, because the stake in getting it out is perhaps the life of some boy fighting on the beachheads. That's what I keep thinking."

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Also in the "champ" class are two Negro women riveters, who set a record of 104 rivets in 120 seconds. Workers in a west coast aircraft plant, these women were giving more than full measure of their strength and skill. They worked as a team on bomb-bay doors for the PV-1 Ventura bomber, among the first American planes consistently to bomb the Japanese homeland of Paramoshiri, northernmost bastion of the Nippon home defenses.

Among the Negro women workers serving in leadership positions in their unions was an Illinois gun-plant employee who was elected shop steward early in the war by a department composed of 5 Negro women and 90 white women. In a New York plant making cloth and leather war goods, 6 of the 14 union shop chairladies were Negro. They were elected by the 1,000 men and women members, half of whom were white and half Negro. Another Negro woman early in 1945 was the only woman on the general executive board of a union of transport and service workers, and president of the local to which she belonged. A Negro woman, educational director of a local union of garment workers, was one of the four representatives of American women workers to visit Great Britain early in 1945 in an exchange designed to bring about a better understanding between the two countries. The four women were selected by their respective unions and arrangements for their trip were made by the Office of Labor Production of the War Production Board and the Office of War Information.

Recognition came to another Negro woman war worker when she entered a national magazine contest on "What My Job Means to Me" and won first place plus a \$50 war bond. In her essay she said in part:

"I am an inspector in a war plant. For 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, I stand in line with 5 other girls performing a routine operation that is part of our production schedule. We inspect wooden boxes that are to hold various kinds of munitions, and that range in size from 8 inches to 6 feet. When we approve them they are ready to be packed with shells, bombs, fuzes, parachutes, and other headaches for Hitler and Hirohito. Did I say my job isn't exciting or complicated? I take that back. It may be a simple matter to inspect one box or a dozen, but it's different when you are handling them by the hundreds. The 6 of us in my crew sometimes inspect as many as fourteen or fifteen hundred boxes during one shift. That means 250 apiece—an average of one every 2 minutes, regardless of size.

"Of course the work is hard and sometimes dangerous, but Victory in this war isn't going to come the easy way \* \* \*

#### **Women in Uniform.**

##### **Negro nurses, 1944.**

By 1944 the number of graduate Negro nurses was estimated at 8,000. Besides those serving in such official public health agencies as the Ameri-



can Red Cross and the Army Nurse Corps, Negro nurses were employed by the War Food Administration and the Veterans' Administration. Three hundred Negro nurses were in the Army Nurse Corps, some of whom went overseas. In March 1945 the first Negro nurse was commissioned by the Navy Reserve Nurse Corps.

Opportunities for Negro women to obtain nurses' training have increased greatly during the war period, first through the scholarships available from Public Health Service funds, and later through the Cadet Nurse program. A special course in Nurse Midwifery, aided by Federal funds, is being given at Tuskegee.

**United States Cadet Nurse Corps.**

In June 1943 the acute military and civilian need for nurses was responsible for a significant forward step in nursing education which has greatly aided Negro women seeking such training. This was the passage of the Bolton Act, establishing a United States Cadet Nurse Corps, which operates under the Public Health Service.

Under the provisions of this act, Federal aid is made available for students to take an accelerated nursing course ranging from 24 to 30 months. Federal funds may be used for maintenance for the first 9 months for all students who join the Cadet Nurse Corps. During this period students are known as precadet nurses and are given concentrated instruction and supervision. The act also provides scholarships and a monthly allowance for all students of the Corps. Scholarships cover tuition and all other fees charged by the school and include the cost of books and the school uniform.

In return for advantages received through the Corps, Cadet Nurses must promise that, health permitting, they will remain in essential nursing for the duration of the war. The choice of which essential service is theirs. They are not required to pledge themselves to military service.

Almost 2,000 young Negro women have joined the Cadet Nurse Corps. They represent all but about 600 of the total number enrolled in all schools of nursing admitting Negroes. Of these student nurses, 1,600 are studying in 20 all-Negro schools; the rest are enrolled in schools having both white and Negro students. At the end of one year of the Corps' existence, it was reported that 33 schools of nursing of a possible 55 that admit Negro students have qualified under the Federal program. Five collegiate schools are operating now to prepare young Negro women for administrative, supervisory, and educational positions in the nursing field.

The effect of Federal aid on Negro nursing enrollments is clearly indicated at Freedman's Hospital in Washington, D. C. Freedman's, a Negro school of nursing, had an enrollment of 77 student nurses in 1939 and 78 in 1942, but in 1943, the year the Bolton Act was passed, the enrollment went to 116 and in 1944 jumped to 166.

Directors of schools of nursing admitting Negroes see the Corps as accomplishing a twofold service: It is enabling young women who finish

high school to enter a professional field, and it is enabling schools of nursing to set higher scholastic standards.

Another progressive step was that taken by Sydenham Hospital in New York City when it announced in December 1943 that it would admit any qualified Negro into the ranks of its internes, resident physicians, surgeons, and nurses, and that Negroes also would be represented on its board of trustees. Thus Sydenham has become the first voluntary hospital in the United States to function on a completely interracial basis. The reorganization of the hospital was carried through by an interracial committee organized by the New York Urban League. Among those commenting favorably on Sydenham's action was the Medical Society of the County of New York, which passed a resolution urging the acceptance of a similar policy by all voluntary hospitals.

#### **Women's Army Corps.**

Of the first 436 women to become officers in the WAAC (now WAC), 36 were Negroes. By January 1945 there were 120 Negro officers and 3,900 enlisted Negro WACS. In the course of their service, many WACS are being given new training. In some cases this covers work not previously done by women. Negro WACS are competently filling jobs ranging from pharmacist to graphotype-machine operator.

"I just had to sell my share in the drug store and get into a uniform before I could feel right," said the only Negro WAC on duty at the Station Hospital at Fort Dix, N. J., who qualifies for her job as a pharmacist. Now a sergeant, in civilian life she was co-owner for 4 years of a city drug store and secretary of a druggists' association.

Thousands of letters and parcels, incorrectly addressed, never would reach the soldiers for whom they are intended if it were not for the job Negro WACS are doing in the post office at Camp Breckinridge, Ky. These "detectives" of the post locator department deal with wrong spelling, incomplete addresses, poor handwriting, and whatever else comes up to interfere with speedy delivery of the soldiers' mail.

Using a spray gun to paint names, numbers, and insignia on various types of Army vehicles is one of the jobs of a Negro sergeant and a private serving in the Ordnance branch at the Automotive General Maintenance Shop at Camp Breckinridge. Other Negro WACS in this camp are assigned such jobs as cleaning and inspecting spark plugs for Army motor vehicles, painting jeeps, staff cars, and trucks. One Negro WAC operates a graphotype machine to produce the metal identification plates, commonly referred to as "dog tags."

Servicing trucks is the job of a Negro WAC at Fort Huachuca, Ariz. Another Negro WAC operated a mimeograph machine at the station hospital, while other WACS at Fort Huachuca have served in such varied capacities as switchboard operator, officer worker, cook. The first Negro WAC unit to be sent overseas arrived in England in February 1945. It is

serving as a postal battalion for the European theater. A total of 24 officers and 677 enlisted women are in the unit.

**Women's Naval Reserve.**

On October 19, 1944, the Navy Department announced that Negro women would be accepted in the Women's Reserve, U. S. Naval Reserve. The Navy's statement is quoted here:

The President today approved a plan submitted by the Navy Department providing for the acceptance of Negro women in the Women's Reserve of the Navy. The plan calls for the immediate commissioning of a limited number of especially qualified Negro women to serve as administrative officers. They will assist in the subsequent planning and supervision of the program for Negro women which will be administered as an integral part of the Women's Reserve. Enlistment of Negro women will be undertaken as soon as these plans have been completed . . . Officer candidates and enlisted women will be trained at existing schools for the training of WAVES. The number to be enlisted will be determined by the needs of the service.

**American Red Cross.**

Some 200 Negroes, the majority of them women, were in Red Cross overseas work late in 1944. They were in every theater of war—in Great Britain, Italy, France, North Africa, South Pacific, Australia, and the India-Burma-China theater. Bending their varied talents toward the single vital objective of harking up America's fighting men, these women have shelved their peacetime activities for the duration. They were appointed as assistant club directors, staff assistants, assistant program directors, and personnel-service directors at overseas military stations.

In this country by the middle of 1944 the Home Service Division of the Red Cross was employing Negro women as case workers and in clerical jobs in a great many cities of the United States. In Chicago alone more than 100 Negro women were so employed. Among the other cities where Negro women were on the Red Cross home-service pay rolls are Savannah, Birmingham, New Orleans, Dallas, St. Louis, Louisville, Columbus, Cleveland, Evansville, New York City, Brooklyn, and Washington. Negro women have worked in the Home Service Division both at the District of Columbia Chapter and at National Headquarters of the Red Cross, in the latter only since late in 1944. Some dozen were employed there as stenographers, and as junior and senior correspondents.

#### STATUS IN 1940 AND IN 1944 <sup>1</sup>

##### In 1940.

Generally speaking, women who have jobs or who are looking for work must earn their own living or help in the support of their families. This is especially true of Negro women. The income of the Negro family is much lower than that of the white and the woman's earnings are very much needed. According to a study made by the National Resources Committee, the median income of white families in the rural South in 1935-36 was more than twice as high as that of Negro families, the median for white families being \$1,100 and that for Negro families \$480. In the urban South white incomes were three times as high, on the average, as Negro incomes; white families' incomes had a median of \$1,570, while that for Negroes was \$525. In 3 large north-central cities the median income of white families was almost 60 percent higher than that of Negro families, the median for white families being \$1,720 and that for Negro families \$1,095.

In 1940 nearly 2 in every 5 Negro women, in contrast to 2 in every 8 white women, were in the labor force. A little over 1½ million (1,542,273) Negro women, of a total of 4,785,233 Negro women 14 years old and over, were employed in 1940; 60,168 were on public emergency work and 178,521 were experienced workers seeking jobs.

Over a million Negro women, constituting 70 percent of all Negro women employed in 1940, were in the service occupations, according to the census for that year. An enormous number of these women—about 918,000—were employed in private families, and some 98,000 were cooks, waitresses, and other such service workers elsewhere than in private homes. The remaining 60,000 workers in service trades were in miscellaneous personal-service occupations, such as beauticians (14,800), boarding-house and lodging-house keepers (13,600), charwomen and janitors (12,400), practical nurses (11,000), housekeepers and hostesses (3,000), and elevator operators (3,300).

Agriculture employed the next largest number of Negro women. About 245,000 were agricultural workers in 1940, of whom some 128,000 were unpaid family workers. Over 70,000 were paid farm laborers and foremen. More than 46,000 were farmers and farm managers.

<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census.

Practically 66,000 Negro women were engaged in professional and semi-professional work, teachers accounting for 50,000 of this number. In addition, some 900 were college presidents, professors, and instructors, while 95 were artists and art teachers. The nearly 6,700 trained nurses and student nurses ranked next in this classification, and the 1,960 musicians and music teachers ranked third. Almost 1,700 were social and welfare workers. More than 120 were dentists, pharmacists, osteopaths, or veterinarians, and 129 were physicians and surgeons. Nearly 200 were actresses and over 100 were authors, editors, and reporters. Thirty-nine were lawyers and judges. Four hundred were librarians.

Practically 11,000 Negro women were proprietors, managers, and officials in lines other than farming; more than 4,800 of these were in eating and drinking places and more than 3,900 in other trade enterprises.

Sales and kindred workers in general numbered 7,600; agents, brokers, etc., accounted for 1,300, saleswomen 5,300, and canvassers, news vendors, and the like the remaining 1,000 and more.

Clerical and kindred workers were an important group, numbering more than 13,000. Stenographers, typists, and secretaries aggregated 4,100; bookkeepers, accountants, and cashiers 2,100; and clerks not specified 6,500. Only 92 were reported as operators of office machines, and only 267 were telephone and telegraph operators.

Operatives and kindred workers numbered more than 96,000 of the Negro women reported. Not far from 36,000 were in manufacturing, the chief groups being 11,300 in apparel and other fabricated textile products, 11,000 in tobacco manufactures, and 5,600 in food and related products. About 7,200 were reported as in nonmanufacturing industries and services. Also in the operatives' total were the 11,300 dressmakers and seamstresses not in factories, the 39,300 laundry operatives not in private families, and 2,800 other women.

Government service employed approximately 8,300 Negro women. Of this number, not far from 1,000 were in the Postal Service; 218 were in national defense, and over 7,000 were classified only as "Government."

#### Changes, 1910 to 1911<sup>3</sup>

The employment of Negroes in civilian jobs increased by almost a million between April 1910 and April 1911. Six hundred thousand of this increase was in women's employment. During this 4-year period the employment of Negro women rose from 1.5 million to 2.1 million. Their

<sup>3</sup>This analysis of the industrial and occupational distribution of employed Negro women is based on Bureau of the Census data published in the *Monthly Labor Review* for January 1912. Data from the April 1910 decennial census are compared with April 1911 census data shown by the *Monthly Report on the Labor Force*. The 1911 data are based on a sample of a comparatively small number of persons and are subject to a larger sampling error than the national totals for 1910, and for this reason absolute numbers are not given in all cases.

employment increased by 40 percent, in contrast to a 51-percent gain for white women.

	Negro		White	
	1940	1944	1940	1944
Percent employed women were of—				
All women of their racial group 14 and over.....	32.2	40.2	21.0	30.8
All employed women 14 and over.....	13.8	17.5	85.9	87.5
All employed persons of their racial group 14 and over.....	34.4	39.6	23.6	32.1
All employed persons 14 and over.....	3.4	4.1	21.2	28.8

Most dominant changes in Negro employment during the 4 years were a marked movement from the farms to the factories, especially to those making war munitions, and a substantial amount of upgrading, but there was little change in the proportions occupied in unskilled jobs.

Slightly over 7 in every 10 employed Negro women were in some service activity in April 1940. The great majority of these (918,000) were domestic employees. After 4 years there was only a slight decrease in the proportion in the services, though a significant internal shift had taken place. While the proportion of domestic employees showed a marked decrease, those occupied in such personal services as beautician, cook, waitress, etc., showed a corresponding increase. The actual number of Negro domestic workers increased slightly between 1940 and 1944, the number in these occupations rising by about 50,000, but this addition was not sufficient to offset the decline of 400,000 among white domestic employees.

As before stated, for both Negro women and men the most definite occupational shift was from the farm to the factory. The proportion of Negro women on farms was cut in half in the 4 years. In April 1940, 16 percent of all Negro women in the labor force were on the farms; 4 years later only 8 percent remained, and the number employed on farms had decreased by about 30 percent.

While the total number of Negro women employed had increased by about a third, the number employed as craftsmen and foremen and as factory operatives almost quadrupled.

For both Negro women and men the greatest gain in employment opportunities came in skilled and semiskilled factory operations which few had performed before the war. Consequently, for a great many Negro workers this is the first opportunity to demonstrate their ability to perform basic factory operations in such capacities. Negro women's employment increased not only in the munitions factories but in food, clothing, textiles, leather, and all other manufacturing. The greatest increase was in the metals, chemicals, and rubber group. Fewer than 3,000 Negro women were employed in this group in April 1940; 4 years later 50 times as many were so employed.

In the other major occupational groups the percentage increases were large, but the numbers involved were not sufficient to have much effect on the occupational distribution of Negro women. The number working as proprietors, managers, or officials trebled. Those working as saleswomen almost doubled, while those engaged as clerical workers rose to a number five times as great as before.

The proportion of Negro women in the professional and semiprofessional fields decreased slightly, but there was a small increase in numbers.

There was a notable increase in Negro employment in Government service (Federal, State, county, municipal). In April 1944 about 200,000 Negroes were employed in this field in contrast to fewer than 60,000 in the same month of 1940.

The 1940 major occupation groups are not comparable with those for preceding decades because of the changes in occupational classifications. However, there has been developed a classification on the basis of social-economic groups, which permits tracing broad occupational levels. Social-economic groupings are not the same as the major occupation groups used elsewhere in this report. Though titles may show similarity, for a specific social-economic group some occupations are omitted and others added, as compared with the occupation group it resembles. The 1940 data include the employed, the experienced seeking work, and those on public emergency work; the distribution in the various social-economic groups has been estimated. For the decades before 1940, figures are for "gainful workers." The following table shows the social-economic grouping of Negro women, 1910-1940:

*Social-Economic Grouping of Negro Women, 1910-1940<sup>1</sup>*

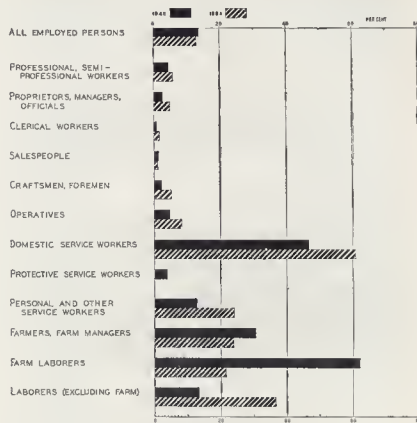
Social-economic group	Number of women				Percent distribution			
	1910 <sup>2</sup> (estimated)	1930 <sup>2</sup>	1920 <sup>2</sup>	1940 <sup>2</sup>	1940	1930	1920	1910
Total.....	1,789,962	1,848,642	1,571,289	2,803,981	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional persons, Proprietors, managers, and officials.....	72,856	69,135	37,684	28,844	4.1	3.3	2.4	1.4
Farmers (owners and ten- ants).....	46,743	76,422	80,429	79,931	2.6	4.2	5.1	4.0
Wholesale and retail deal- ers, and other propri- etors, managers, and of- ficials.....	11,065	10,302	7,439	6,621	.6	.6	.5	.3
Clerks and kindred workers.....	29,765	29,331	15,046	6,772	1.7	1.1	1.0	.3
Skilled workers and farmers.....	2,449	1,375	1,677	1,801	.4	.4	.4	.1
Semiskilled workers.....	264,838	186,067	140,955	109,679	16.0	10.1	9.0	5.1
Unskilled workers.....	309,111	410,544	530,323	976,494	11.8	22.8	33.8	16.2
Farm laborers.....	12,523	30,922	41,961	16,748	1.1	1.7	2.7	.8
Other laborers.....	1,164,302	1,030,067	715,053	793,967	52.0	56.3	45.5	39.4
Servant classes.....								

<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census, *A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States*, by Alta M. Edwards (1930); and *The Labor Force (Sample Statistics)*, Unal Occupation, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Distribution estimated; labor force (except new workers) 14 years old and over.

<sup>3</sup> Gainful workers 10 years old and over.

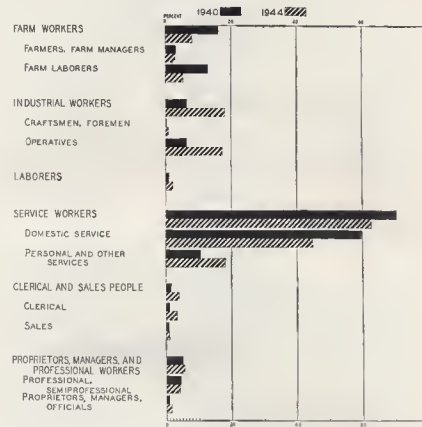
Percent of Negro Women Among Total Employed Workers in Specified Occupational Groups, April 1940 and April 1944<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census.

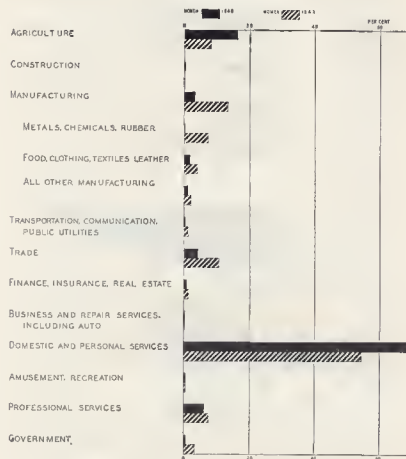


Percent Distribution of Employed Negro Women, by Occupation,  
April 1940 and April 1944<sup>1</sup>



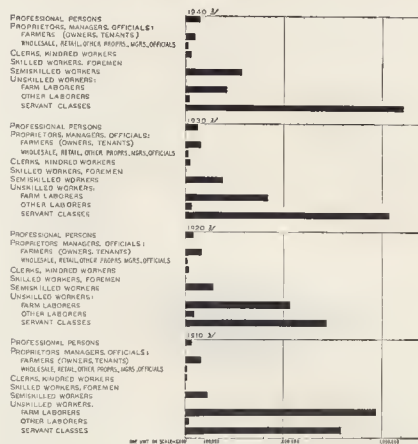
<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census. Protective service, less than 0.05 percent.

Percent Distribution of Employed Negro Women, by Industry,  
April 1940 and April 1944<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census. Less than 0.05 percent of all Negro women were in forestry and fishing, in mining, and (in 1944) in construction.

Numbers of Negro Women in Specified Social-Economic Groups,  
1910-40<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source of information: Bureau of the Census, *A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States*, by Alvin M. Edwards (1938); and *The Labor Force (Sample Statistics)*, *United States, 1940*, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> Distribution estimated labor force (except new workers) 14 years old and over.

<sup>3</sup> Gainful workers 10 years old and over.

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